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ABSTRACT

The history and current use of the label "Hispanic" are discussed in this exploration of the myth of cultural and national homogeneity among people of Latin American descent in the United States. The historical process of labeling groups of individuals is discussed, and how ethnic labels affect the meaning of citizenship and the struggle for full social participation is illustrated. The experiences of 9 men and 13 women working in the New York garment industry are presented to illustrate how Latin American immigrants become instant "Hispanics" as they enter the United States. The establishment of the labeled Hispanic community has contributed to shaping this population's U.S. experience. An important aspect of the new definition, or repositioning, of an American is the importance that English language skills have for the recent immigrant; it is an issue that immigrants often avoided in earlier days of less complex economics and job demands. The debate over bilingual education and the English Only movements are clear indications of the country's increasing reluctance to tolerate diversity. The history of bilingual education legislation and English Only demonstrate the complexity of prejudices and discrimination. Seven chapters and the introduction are entitled as follows: (1) "Hispanics in the United States: 'We All Sing a Different Song'"; (2) "'Hispanics? That's What 'They' Call Us'"; (3) "'So Far from God, so Close to the United States': The Roots of Hispanic Homogenization"; (4) "'Establishing an Identity' in the Sixties: The Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican Movements"; (5) "Hispanic Ethnicity, The Ethnic Revival, and Its Critique"; (6) "Hispanics and the Dynamics of Race and Class: The Fieldwork Data"; (7) "Language, National Identity, and the Ethnic Label Hispanic"; and (8) "Imagined Communities Revisited." (Contains 349 References.) (SLD)

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